

Mining



The mining industry (except oil and gas) is classified with NAICS 212 by the Bureau of Labor Statistics as part of the natural resources and mining supersector, “comprised of establishments that extract naturally occurring mineral solids.” Sounds simple enough, but the mining industry is so much more. Mining is second only to agriculture as the world’s oldest industry, and mineral and mineral-based products play important roles in the state’s economy and in modern society. Mining is necessary to obtain any material that cannot be grown through agricultural processes or created artificially in a factory or laboratory.

In the past 10 years, mining (except oil and gas) employment in Utah peaked in 2008 with an annual average of 5,170, steadily dropped in the next 2 years to 4,750 and then climbed back up to 5,015 in 2011. Kennecott Utah Copper is one of the largest employers in the state. They are the second-largest copper producer in the U.S., producing nearly a quarter of the nation’s annual copper needs, and have been a major economic driver in Utah for over 100 years.

The mining industry contains a good variety of occupations. You may be surprised to know that it includes not only the well-known refinery operators, machine operators and truck drivers, but also geoscientists who study the physical aspects of the earth as well as operating engineers who operate several types of power construction equipment.

Mining jobs can often be dangerous, and keeping people safe and healthy both in the workplace and in the surrounding areas are industry priorities. Through regulations, better technology and improved training practices, safety has improved in all types of mining work conditions. Recently in Utah the industry has seen a frequent and continuing collaboration among mine management, education, labor, government and industry experts. These specialists are dedicated to eliminating the hazards often associated with mining. The University of Utah, for example, provides state-of-the-art training in mine safety to students in the College of Mines and Earth Sciences, teaching future leaders of the industry. These efforts to diminish unsafe conditions remain a top priority.

Although in terms of employment it is the smallest industrial sector in Utah, without mining, we would not be able to enjoy and improve the way we live and the products that we use. It is the basis for the production of metals, ceramics, fertilizers, pharmaceuticals, chemicals and electronics. Mining is the foundation of and vital to the progress of other industries and how they perform and grow. Mined materials are needed to construct roads and buildings; to make automobiles, computers, satellites, phones and windows; and to generate electricity and heat. Mining is also used to make books, carpet, clothing and cosmetics. Virtually everything we do, use or operate would be impossible without the resources mining provides. 